# NOVACON

## THE MAGAZINE

ISSUE 46

£8.99 OVER PRICED

## ASKING THE QUESTIONS NO ONE ELSE WILL

**THIS ISSUE WE ASK:**

JULIET McKENNA - HER IMPRESSIONS OF LED ZEPPLIN'S 4TH ALBUM

*"I'm sorry I don't do impressions."*

THE COMMITTEE'S OPINION ON DUCK HUSBANDRY

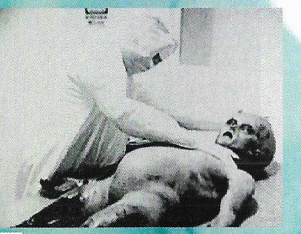
**PLUS:**

LOCH NESS MONSTER SIGHTED IN INVERNESS BATHTUB!

Photos page 6

THE ROSWELL AUTOPSY HOAX: WAS IT A DOUBLE HOAX?

*And if so what does that even mean?*



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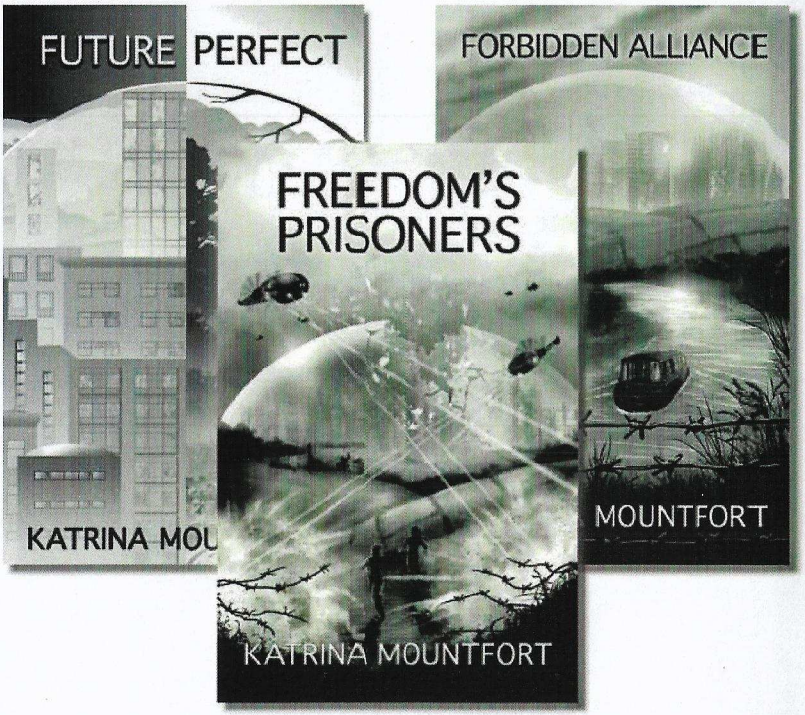
**In a future where personal relationships are forbidden, conformity is enforced through fear. But is life any better for those who escape the Citidomes?**

"It reminds me of *1984* and *Brave New World*" - BFS

"If you've enjoyed reading *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies, you'll most likely enjoy this very much" - RisingShadow

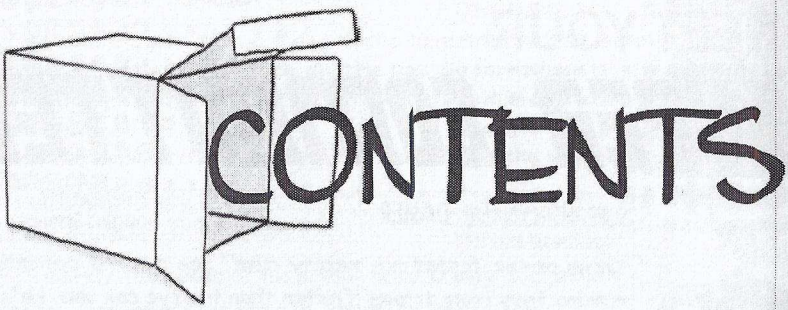
"*Logan's Run* for *The Hunger Games* generation"




JOIN US FOR A DRINK AND THE LAUNCH OF FREEDOM'S PRISONERS

**IN THE DOWNSTAIRS BAR AT 5PM ON SATURDAY**

**WE'RE ALSO IN THE DEALER'S ROOM ALL WEEKEND**




4.....Meet The Committee
We Identify The People You Need To Avoid Like The Plague

6.....The Chairman's Bit
Intolerable Waffling From Our Beloved Chair

8.....Our Code Of Conduct
Because These Days Ya Gotta Have One

10.....An Introduction To Our G.o.H.
By Dr. Kari Maund

15.....The Programme
Find Out What You Will Be Missing Whilst In The Bar

19.....The Albabreshin Compass
A Review By Helena Bowles

22.....A Word On Our Charity
Plus A Piece By Our G.o.H.'s Father, John P. Mckenna

24.....GCSE
Rules And Regulations

26.....The GCSE Paper
Go On, We Dare You To Sit It

29.....Our Membership List

All material contained withing these pages is hardly worth printing in the first place so why anyone would want to copy it is, quite frankly, beyond our ability to comprehend. However, if you should, then you may very well feel the wrath of the Committee descending upon you (which usually takes the form of demands to buy us a round at the bar and when you've paid we never, ever, go away (if you don't buy us a drink expect a particularly nasty chinese burn and a swift kick in the family jewels). Nuff said.

Cover Photo: Lou Abercrombie

# MEET YOUR SUPER COMMITTEE

SUPERHERO NAME: **DASHER** — SECRET IDENTITY: Douglas Spencer

Known as the 'fastest man nearly alive'. See him this convention running from room to room faster than the eye can see. He's like the Six Million Dollar Man, moves so fast it looks just like he's moving in slo-mo. He even makes the Da-da-da-da-da sound.... Though this may be the beginnings of a stammer.

SUPERHERO NAME: **IRON BALLS** — SECRET IDENTITY: Steve Lawson

Gifted with enhanced genitalia, he is capable of deflecting bullets and withstanding incredible knocks to his nether regions. Don't believe me? Just go up to him anytime during the con and give him a swift kick in the plums... he'll just laugh it off.... Trust me.

SUPERHERO NAME: **HARVEY** — SECRET IDENTITY: Eve Harvey

The name's not just a coincidence... she really is a Pooka. Invisible to most people you will only know of her presence as you see the level in your wine glass slowly dropping. Or, as in most cases, rapidly dropping. If you see her around, pretend you haven't seen her or your friends will think you're nuts... more nuts.

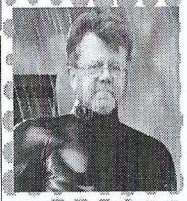
SUPERHERO NAME: **CAPTAIN INVISIBLE** — SECRET IDENTITY: Tony Berry

Actually, he's not really invisible but pretends he is. See him, or rather don't, around the con pretending to lift drinks as if there is no one there! Try not to punch him in the face as he does this for the one hundredth time while going "Oooooooooooo".

SUPERHERO NAME: **THE CAT** — SECRET IDENTITY: Cat (Not really that secret)

Not really endowed with superpowers... She just likes dressing this way. However, if upset she does have a tendency to spit hairballs at you and piddle in the corner of your room. Also, she's hell on the furniture.

SUPERHERO NAME: **BEARDO** SECRET IDENTITY: Dave Hicks



Gifted with a beard from a dying extra-terrestrial visitor, Dave now wears it stuck to his face all the time. So far it hasn't revealed any superpowers but he thinks it makes him look cool and mature.
Feel free to point out how wrong he is all through the weekend.

SUPERHERO NAME: **THE ICE MAN** SECRET IDENTITY: Richard Standage

With merely the power of his mind he can create ICE from nothing. One minute his hand is empty the next... ICE! Unfortunately, he can only create ice in 10cm square cubes which makes him a terrible Superhero but an indispensable guest at parties... Book him now!

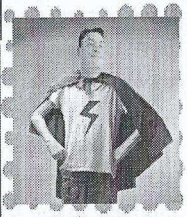
SUPERHERO NAME: **THESAURUS** SECRET IDENTITY: Helena Bowles

The Mighty Wordsmith! See her heal split infinitives by the sheer power of batting the editor around the head until he starts typing in some semblance of English. Her mighty powers are no match for mere mortals... though why she wears the bat costume is still something of a mystery.

SUPERHERO NAME: **WEB MASTER** SECRET IDENTITY: John Harvey

He is Master of the digital realm. With a flick of his wrist he can make your online presence disappear! Hell, he made his own online presence disappear... and our accounts... I don't actually think he knows what he's doing. For god's sake, don't let him near your PC.

SUPERHERO NAME: **FALLOUT BOY** SECRET IDENTITY: Gary Starr

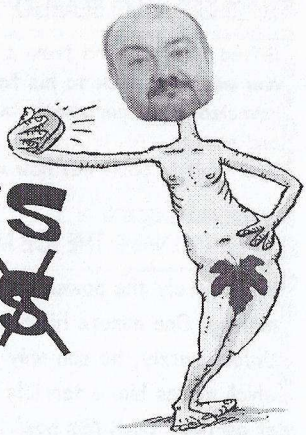


Named Not for the Radioactive origin of his superpowers but for a series of unfortunate costume failures that have landed him in court on more than one occasion. If you see him at the convention best cover your wife/girlfriend/mother's eyes just in case.

SUPERHERO NAME: **SOTTO** SECRET IDENTITY: Alice Lawson

Struck in the larynx by lightning as a child she can barely raise her voice above a whisper. Which is a terrible superpower when you think of it. At disaster scenes, she can be barely heard shouting "look out. Behind you!". If you see her at the con you may strain to hear what she is saying.

# THE CHAIRMAN'S BITS



**Welcome** to **Novacon 46**, the land where interesting things happen and where there is beer. Please read the entire programme book assiduously before attempting to participate. Alternatively, head straight for the bar, and catch up with reading this on the following Tuesday... like most people do.

We're very pleased to be able to tell you that our **Guest of Honour** this year is the wonderful **Juliet McKenna**, chosen partly because of the fiction she writes, and partly because there are lots of other things she does on which she's happy to talk and about which she's capable of being interesting. Hurrah! Say hello and buy her a pint if she wants one. Go to her programme items, buy her books, tell your friends.

All the usual tomfoolery you'd expect at a **Novacon** is taking place. There is an excellent programme with earnest panel discussions, book launches, workshops, kaffeeklatsches and silly games. We have science speakers. We have artists. Some of the science speakers are also artists. There will be a **Science Auction** (*what's that?*). There won't be a **Science Auction** (*Oh*), but there will be an **Art Show,** and an **Art Auction.**

There will also be a **Book Auction** (*I know, I have handed over some review books that I need to shift*). Many exciting new possessions are available for your purchase in the **Dealer's Room**, where you can also find people eager to interest you in membership of other conventions. In a darkened room downstairs Mr Lally will be in attendance, so go and find out what he has to show you (*that could lead to trouble – Ed*). Elsewhere in this slim volume is the **GCSFE Quiz**, with a prize available for some random entrant. Talking of prizes, there is a raffle in aid of the convention charity, **RNIB Talking Books**, which will be drawn at the awards/handover ceremony. We expect everyone to have a good time.

On Sunday evening, when you thought there was no more fun to be had, there is our traditional **Beer Tasting And Banquet**. Participation in the Beer Tasting is gained by possession of a Beer Badge, which you can obtain by bringing three bottles of interesting beer to the registration desk, or by handing over six quid; participation in the banquet is gained by possession of a Meal Ticket, which you can also buy at registration. The **Banquet** this year, by request of the **Guest of Honour**, involves Chinese food.

It's natural to assume that all the great stuff that happens over the weekend is the result solely of the convention Chair's efforts, but the reality is that none of this would happen without the rest of the Committee, the Tech Crew, the Art Show team, auctioneers and bookkeepers, dealers, van drivers, programme participants, gophers, other volunteers, and hotel staff. I owe huge thanks to all of those people.

Now you can occupy a few moments going back over this page to try and find a word with three successive pairs of doubled letters "xxyyzz" in it. Go on, you know you want to.

Douglas Spencer, Chair, **Novacon 46**

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# Novacon 46 Code of Conduct

## *"Let's be excellent to each other!"*

### *Oh... there needs to be more? OK, then.*

A Convention is a private event and, as such, the Committee has always had the right and the ability to remove any attendee for antisocial behaviour. Over recent years, it has become standard practice for such events to publish a Code of Conduct providing guidelines as to what that antisocial behaviour may include.

For most people, the simple principle of, "Behave like a decent human being," is enough of a guideline. However, just in case, these are the behaviours we feel lead to that result:

1. **Be welcoming**. We expect all our attendees to respect each other's right to be at Novacon. In particular, discriminatory behaviour or harassment will not be tolerated.

2. **Be courteous** and aware we all have different sensitivities. If your language or behaviour is unwelcome to another attendee then **stop**. Anything else may be considered harassment.

3. **Be respectful** of other people's boundaries. Physical contact should only occur with all parties' enthusiastic consent. Remember, not everyone likes being hugged.

4. **Be aware** that communication may be verbal or non-verbal.

**Discrimination** includes, but is not limited to: sex, gender, gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion and mental or physical disability.

**Harassment** includes, but is not limited to, any behaviour that can be reasonably expected to disturb or intimidate another convention attendee. It may be verbal or non-verbal.

### Dealing with discrimination or harassment

If you feel comfortable, address the person and the problem behaviour directly. In most cases this will be all that is required.

If you are not comfortable with a direct approach then either:

- report the matter to the Duty Committee Member (look for the gold waistcoat). He/she will contact the designated people who will come to talk to you as soon as possible, or

- contact one of the designated committee members directly on the number below.

## Convention Response and Responsibilities

The Novacon 46 Convention Committee is responsible for enforcing the Code of Conduct and for maintaining confidentiality.

Two committee members are designated to deal with complaints. These are **Helena Bowles** and **Alice Lawson**. The complaint will be heard, in confidence, in a private place, and an appropriate response agreed upon with the complainant. This may be any of the following:

**Arbitration between the parties involved.**
**One, and only one, verbal warning.**
**Rescinding of convention membership without refund and/or refusal of membership at future Novacons.**
**Reporting the incident to the police.**

**The committees decision in this matter is final.**

***If a complaint is made about you, either to your face or via the designated committee members your interaction with the complainant is over. Full stop.***

In cases of a dispute with the hotel, the committee will support the hotel and the hotel's own Code of Conduct.

*The standard of judgement in these matters is the "reasonable person" standard as applied by the designated committee members. Attempts to "rules lawyer" the Code of Conduct will be seen as a sign of bad faith.*

*This Code of Conduct is considered to be a living document and is expected to evolve year on year. That said, we need to lock down the Code for each convention. This is the iteration that will be in use at Novacon 46. Constructive comments are welcome and will be considered when drawing up the Novacon 47Code of Conduct. Please address suggestions to Helena Bowles on the email below.*

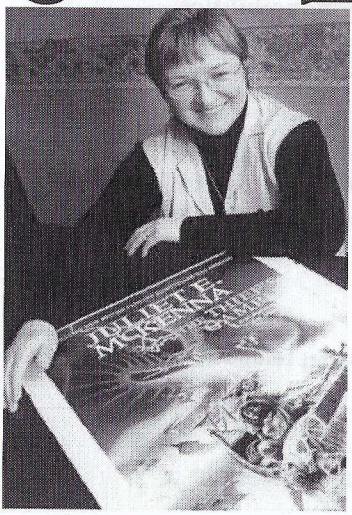
## DESIGNATED COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND CONTACT NUMBER

**Helena Bowles & Alice Lawson: 0751 486 7770**
**Helena Bowles email:**
**helenalibriomancer@gmail.com**

Thank you to JMcK for the for the use of this photo

# An Introduction To

# Juliet E. McKenna




By

Dr. Kari Maund

**I'm** pretty sure Juliet E. McKenna is a superhero. I've yet to find proof positive of what the exact nature of her powers may be, but every time I meet her, she impresses me more and more and rather brilliant things have a habit of happening around her... . She's a writer – of long and short fiction, of epic and urban fantasy, weird crime, horror, sf and classic adventure. She's also a prolific reviewer and blogger; a consistent clear supportive voice for new writers and women writers and writers of colour. She's a social activist, campaigning for fairness in society, for equal access for all, for the rights of small and micro-businesses, for the bullied and the excluded. Last year she co-led a campaign to reform EU law on VAT for online sales and won support and respect in Westminster and Brussels. She's a gifted scholar in her chosen field of classics. She has run cons and organised book festivals. She's clever and funny and excellent company. And, as she would point out herself, she's a lethal weapon in disguise, holding a third Dan black belt in Aikido.

She began publishing in the late 1990s with **The Thief's Gambit**, the first in her *Einarinn Chronicles* sequence, which now stands at fifteen. This is epic fantasy, certainly, but it is far from the standard tropes of wars to gain crowns, stable-boy kings, magic horses and heroic aristocrats that populate the mainstream.

Nor are her books 'grimdark' in the clichéd sense of the word: they are gritty, yes, and often grim and dark and painful – and the stakes for her characters are very real and have lasting and damaging consequences, but this is not a one-note world in which everyone will sell out. Rape and murder are inevitable (or cynically natural) and only the fittest and least scrupulous survive. Jules is a realistic writer, certainly, wounds leave scars, betrayals can be impossible to heal, and bad things happen over and over to decent people. However, she is neither a nihilist nor a cynic, and she does not succumb to the idea of pre-industrial cultures as bloody and muddy and always unkind. This is a world in which actions have consequences far beyond what the actor imagined or planned for and in which responsibilities must be shouldered, and shouldered long-term. Her characters are seldom aristocrats and often they come from the margins of

the various societies she depicts. The problems they face are about survival, personal and communal.

Underpinning all her work is a resistance to traditional fantasy models (and to popular ideas of history) which see only the deeds of the great as interesting and only the fates of kingdoms as worthy of report. Against a broad canvas of a whole continent of differing, conflicting cultures, she tells stories at both the individual level – how will the protagonist survive, escape, find a role for themselves in a society which despises or marginalises or trammels them? – and also at the level of the group - how will a conquered people resist those who invade them? How can ordinary farmers and peddlers and shopkeepers confront and end the exploitation they face from warring, greedy nobles?

There are no easy answers in any of her books, and people have to compromise or take up burdens to which they feel deeply unequal. Sometimes they fail. Sometimes they die. She places unexpected people at the heart of her stories, too: a woman from a mixed heritage, a man living with a serious disability, a widow trapped by tradition and lack of education, a man of colour displaced from wealth and comfort into a battle to survive. She confronts issues of colonialism and slavery, the greed of the powerful and the endless hunger some have to turn everything possible to their own advantage. Oh, and she is one of the very few fantasy writers I know who depicts mothers as people with full agency and significant lives. Her books are rich in detail and event, written in an engaging style, exciting, complex and very very sharp. It is hard to come away from one of them without new thoughts and insights into real world problems.

Recently, she has turned her hand to creating a new world, the *River Kingdom*, very different to *Einarinn*. This is a land of secrets and hidden dangers, in which magic is suddenly and alarmingly real yet, simultaneously, arcane and elided. The characters are grooms and widows, herd boys and young, uncertain, priests, all of them positioned low in their local hierarchies and often cut off from power and influence by their social position. The stories explore domestic violence and colonialism, ghosts and human rights and the problems of survival when you have little and are seen as unimportant. As with the *Einarinn* stories, this is intensely political writing but the mode is more discursive, looking directly at the consequences when someone has a power they don't understand or don't want to use thoughtfully, or exploit for selfish ends. It is not allegory – she's a much more subtle writer than that – but there is much here about unexplored privilege, responsibility and the cost of insularity.

Photo Copyright Lou Abercrombie

Jules is a founder member of **The Write Fantastic**, a collective of fantasy writers created to raise the profile of fantasy writing within the UK. With her fellow members (which have over the years included Chaz Brenchley, Stan Nichols, Sarah Ash, Freda Warrington, Jessica Rydill and the late Deborah Miller) she has organised appearances, workshops and one-day events showcasing their own work and that of other British fantasy authors. And then there's that black belt... . In addition to her regular appearances, Jules has run a series of workshops on fighting techniques and fight choreography for writers, which are both entertaining and informative, and show very clearly the dangers of under-estimating middle-aged women.

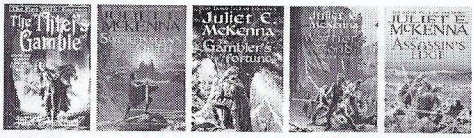
She is a formidable woman, in the best possible sense of that word: formidably bright, formidably talented, and formidably organised. If Jules is involved with something, you can be sure it will be entertaining, thought-provoking, welcoming, and fun. She is a wonderful person to have as a friend – I have that honour – and a fine colleague in every endeavour. I have every faith that she will be a wonderfully interesting and entertaining – and probably super-powered – Guest of Honour at Novacon.

Oh, and she has a trebuchet in her garage.

# Juliet E. McKenna Bibliography

## The Tales Of Einarinn

**The Thief's Gamble** (1999)
**The Swordsman's Oath** (1999)
**The Gambler's Fortune** (2000)
**The Warrior's Bond** (2001)
**The Assassin's Edge** (2002)




## The Aldabreshin Compass

**Southern Fire** (2003)
**Northern Storm** (2004)
**Western Shore** (2005)
**Eastern Tide** (2006)

## The Chronicles Of The Lescari Revolution

**Irons In The Fire** (2009)
**Blood In The Water** (2010)
**Banners In The Wind** (2010)

## The Hadrumal Crisis

**Dangerous Waters** (2011)
**Darkening Skies** (2012)
**Defiant Peaks** (2012)

**Challoner, Murry & Belfour: Monster Hunters At Law** illustrated by Nancy Farmer (2014)

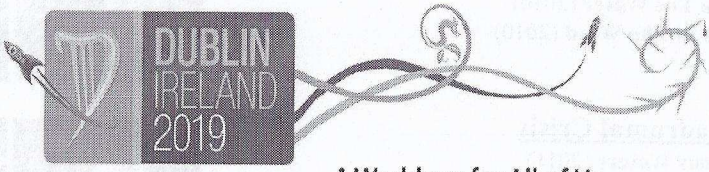
**Shadow Histories Of The River Kingdom** (2016) - Wizard Tower Press

## Short Fiction Featuring Characters From The Tales Of Einarinn

**The Tormalin Necklace** (2001) - F20, The British Science Fantasy Society
**The Wedding Gift** (2003) - An illustrated Tale Of Einarinn
**Turns And Chances** (2004) - An Einarinn novella, PS Publishing
**Win Some, Lose Some** (2005) - Postscripts 5, PS Publishing
**A Spark In The Darkness** (2006) - Postscripts 6, PS Publishing

## Short Stories

**Losing Track Of Time** (2003) - A Big Finish Short Trips story
**Urban Renewal** (2006)
**Identity Theft** (2006)
**Now You See Him, Now You Don't** (2006) - British Fantasy Society
**The Wizard's Coming** (2007) - The Solaris Book Of New Fantasy
**Noble Deceit** (2008) - Subterfuge, Newcon Press
**Walking Shadows** (2008) - Daw
**Patience; A Womanly Virtue** (2009) - British Fantasy Society Yearbook
**Is This My Last Testament?** (2009) - Murky Depths Magazine
**Fear Itself** (2010) - Black Library
**Remembrance** (2010) - Newcon Press
**Reflections** (2010) - Torchwood Magazine
**The Wisdom Of Ages** (2011) - Voices From The Past (Great Ormond St Charity)
**An Unforeseen Legacy** (2011) - Murky Depths Magazine
**The Grand Tour** (2011) - Daw
**She Who Thinks For Herself** (2012) - Resurrection Engines Anthology

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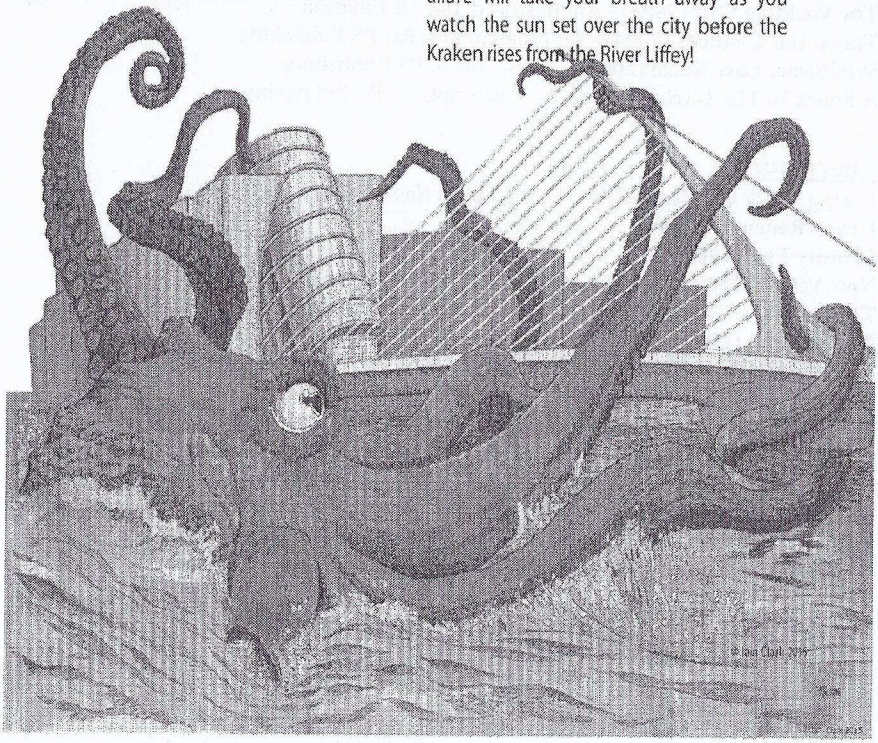
## A Worldcon for All of Us

Ireland has a rich tradition of storytelling. It is a land famous for its ancient myths and legends, great playwrights, award-winning novelists, innovative comics artists, and groundbreaking illustrators. Our well-established science fiction and fantasy community and all of the Dublin 2019 team would consider it an honour to celebrate Ireland's rich cultural heritage, contemporary creators and fandoms everywhere.

We love our venue, the Convention Centre Dublin, and we believe that its spell-binding allure will take your breath away as you watch the sun set over the city before the Kraken rises from the River Liffey!



# PROGRAMME

**An** anonymous committee member responsible for programme grumbles: "Many interesting people join at the last minute or occasionally show up unannounced. Others may change when they're available because of something called 'real life'. The programme will be adjusted to reflect this if needed and you will be updated by announcements at the Opening Ceremony, posters and the traditional man shouting in the bar.

## Friday

**19.00** **Opening Ceremony**

In which we welcome everybody and introduce our splendid **Guest of Honour Juliet McKenna**. Featuring last minute announcements, reminders and some poorly scripted jokes. Plus, a reminder of the wholesome and fulfilling experience to be had from *volunteering to help* run the convention.

**19.30** **Desert Island Books**

No, not a misprint but a cunning twist on the traditional format where **Juliet McKenna** will be interviewed about the *eight* books and *two* pieces of music she'd like on her desert island.

**21.00** **Book Launch Party**

Join us in celebrating the launch of Juliet's new collection of short stories and a novella: *Shadow Histories of the River Kingdom* from **Wizards Tower Press.**
There may also be some copies of some US anthologies not readily available over here.

**22.30** **Science Fiction Pictionary**

A rematch between Dave Hicks and Smuzz as Dave seeks to avenge the moment he was asked to draw *Time Considered as a Helix Of Semiprecious Stones* while his opponent got *Red Mars*. Other artists who are not attached to their dignity are welcome to join in and the audience can supply the titles.

# Saturday

**10.30** **How Green was my Death: The Ecology of Dr Who**

Back due to popular demand: A breakneck rush through the ecological issues of 1963- 2016 as interpreted through the medium of Teatime Terror by Smuzz. Featuring video clips, a Blue Peter Green Book and some interpretative dance.

**12.00** **Gerry Webb: Interplanetary Man**

Gerry has been a fixture in British fandom since about the time your writer was born and involved in the British Interplanetary Society since before then. Still working in commercial space technology at the age of (DELETED), Gerry will also be celebrating a significant birthday at **Novacon** so come and hear someone who endeavoured to live like the viewpoint character of so many of those novels on your shelf.

**13.30** **My fandom, your fandom, *their* fandom**

At **Novacon 1** it was quite simple: there was pretty much one fandom and that was it, even if some of it was far away. Now there are myriad fan cultures shaped by nationality, language and technology. So we've convened a panel of people from far away (OK, we've got an American), who travel to other conventions (our intrepid chairman reports from **IceCon**), or who have been enjoying the fandoms that now exist on the nether regions of the internet

**15.00** **Juliet McKenna: Shelf-life and eBook undeath for the 21st Century Author**

A talk by our **Guest of Honour**. The Dealer's Room will be closed for this item.

**16.30** **Fantasy now.**

A broad discussion on the state of contemporary fantasy writing. A panel including **Stan Nicholls** and **Kari Sperring** discuss the state of the "genre", if it is (like SF) just one genre any more, the themes that writers are addressing and the new variations they put on them.

**18.00** **Writing what you know?**

What actually can and can't be taught to aspiring writers? A panel including our Guest of Honour **Juliet McKenna** discuss the benefits and pitfalls of the advice that may be offered versus the lessons that can only be learned by personal experience.

**19.30** **Poetry Readings**

Poetry used to be a staple form of fan writing and while we may have fewer practitioners in our community these days we still have some gifted ones. The literary section of the day ends with readings from Chris and Pauline Morgan (Chris is a former poet laureate of Birmingham). Anyone who has written their own work is also welcome to offer a reading.

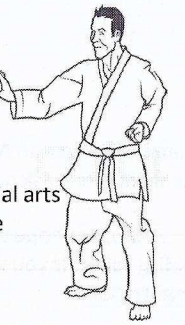
**21.00** **The Collecting Bug**

What is it about army helmets, pens, badges or – heaven help us - science fiction that drives people to collect so many examples of them? There are either a surprising or an all too predictable (depending on your outlook) number of people in fandom who enjoy collecting some unusual things and we will get them to explain the pleasure they get from this. WARNING: You may think you're immune to this sort of thing but by the end of the item you may find yourself considering starting an iron tractor seat collection....

**22.30** **Call my Blurb**

"Funnier than *Psycho*, more chilling than *Jeeves Takes Charge*." Which is something that's been said of several **Novacon** programme items but we finish Saturday with a quiz to test contestants' (and, of course, our brilliant audience's) knowledge of which effusive, flattering, succinct blurb describes which book. Hosted by Ian Sorensen who will keep going until it's not funny anymore, or maybe a bit after that.

# Sunday



**10.00** **The ABC of Aikido**

**Juliet McKenna** will wake you up with some introductory martial arts techniques, a spot of self-defence advice and a new perspective on the fights you see on screen or page.

**11.00** **Things that fall to Earth**

SF Author and scientist **Helen Gould** returns with a fresh talk on meteorites (with sample) and some interactive geology about matter from beyond our world (yes, that means outside the Midlands...).

**12.30** **Art Auction**

One day some of this stuff will be taken by your grandchildren to an episode of *Antiques Roadshow*. Invest in their future now by buying some of the marvellous art that's been on display over the weekend. Chris Morgan will be banging the gavel.

**14.00** **Cover Art – what do we want versus what works**

The publisher has a vision of the cover, the artist has a vision, the writer has a vision. If only they were the same. And in the age of self-publishing when these roles can over-lap, who's right? Includes G.o.H. **Juliet McKenna**

**15.30** **THEN - From Genesis to the b*st**d offspring of Science Fiction Monthly**

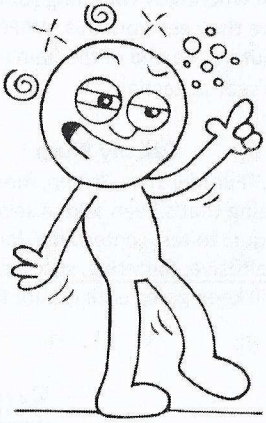
A panel of erudite and learned fans discuss Rob Hansen's recently published *THEN- Science Fiction Fandom in the UK: 1930-1980*, a period that includes the first ten **Novacons**. One of these will be Rob himself and you'll be able to buy copies from him over the weekend.

**17.00** **Awards Ceremony**

It's not called the Closing Ceremony because **Novacon** *never* closes. Time to say a big thank you to all those who made it possible, give out lots of fabulous gifts and prizes and enjoy the best-run raffle in fandom.

**19.30 – Late** **Beer Tasting and Dinner**

There are separate tickets available for the beer tasting and the convention meal (Chinese food this year). These will be available at the Registration Desk throughout the weekend. You can also gain entry to the beer tasting in exchange for three bottles of interesting beer, take them to registration.



## Off piste:

Remember there's an **Art Show** downstairs as well as **Mr Lally's Magic Lantern Show** (New members – ask discretely).

Also, we hope to announce readings and kaffeeklatches with various authors including **Juliet**. If you want to attend any of these then sign-up sheets will be displayed at Registration.

**ELSEWHEN BOOKS** will be launching *Freedom's Prisoners* by **Katrina Mountfort** at 5pm downstairs on Saturday.

A **BOOK AUCTION** will be announced if we have enough books to sell and held downstairs. It usually happens later on Saturday night when you've all had enough beer to ensure you'll bid handsomely for those Pier Anthony trilogies...

There is additional function space downstairs, so if you want have a reading, a workshop or a meeting please get in touch before, or even, at the convention.

# The Aldabreshin Compass

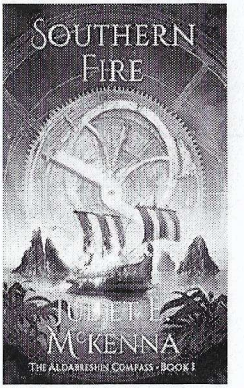
Tetralogy

by

Juliet E. McKenna

A Review By

Helena Bowles




Comprising of the novels ***Southern Fire, Northern Storm, Western Shore*** and ***Eastern Tide.***

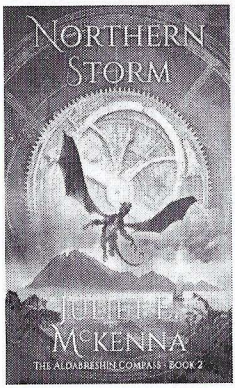
**The** *Aldabreshin Compass* is McKenna's second series set in her world of Einarinn. As such it fits between the *Tales of Einarinn* series (of which *The Thieves Blade* was reviewed in **PR1** and the *Hadrumal Crisis* trilogy reviewed in **PR2**. (***PR's*** *available from* ***Novacon Press*** *for £12.99.... worth a try – Ed*)

The area of Einarinn under scrutiny this time is the Aldabreshin Archipelago; a collection of coral and tropical islands stretching to the far south and ruled over by a collection of warlords. Each Warlord has his own domain within which he is absolute dictator.

Well, in theory anyway. One of the main themes of the *Aldabreshin Compass* sequence is power: what power is, what it means and how freely it can be exercised. The viewpoint character is Kheda the warlord of the Daish domain. At the start of the series he is comfortably settled with three wives, several children and a productive, content populace. He is an honourable man and tries to treat his people well after his father's example.

His content is broken by a flood of refugees from the Chazen domain which lies further south. Investigation reveals an influx of barbarian magicians and that is a real problem. Apart from the actual damage sorcery could directly inflict, the Aldabreshin culture abhors magic and regards anyone even tangentially touched by it with a deep-seated horror. Anyone found guilty of sorcery, or of causing sorcery to be used, will probably end up with their flayed hide decorating some Warlord's door.

Kheda attempts to bring together a coalition of Warlords to find a strategy to defeat these foreign magicians. Instead he finds himself caught in a snare of politics. His domain is the closest threatened and those further north are quite happy to use Daish as a buffer zone and to sacrifice the Chazen domain and its weak Warlord. Narrowly




avoiding an assassination attempt, Kheda allows his "death" to become common knowledge and sets out to find help. Somewhere, he reasons, there must be a cure for, or defence against, magical attack. His travels give us a view of other domains - ones less fortunate in the personality of their Warlord - and a quiet narrative questioning of the frailties of a system that invests so much power in one man's honour and integrity.

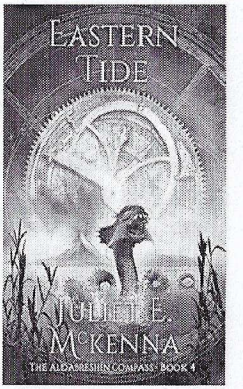
The matters of honour and integrity become of increasing concern to Kheda as his scruples become worn away. Finally, he is forced to acknowledge that the only force he can find that seems able to fight magic is more magic. That means calling for help from the sorcerous barbarians of the north. It also means viewing himself as being irrevocably tainted. Another issue then arises: how do you stop using magic?

The series continues with a series of magical and political challenges to Kheda's rule. One strips him of his comfortable life and places him as leader of the weak Chazen domain where he must try to build the kind of solid political structure that he inherited in Daish. Theoretically, as Warlord, nothing could touch him except for a direct military threat. In actual fact, Kheda is bound by custom, tradition and circumstance. His loss of political power is directly attributable to the ramifications of his faked death. The news is brought to him by his chief wife, Janne. For the sake of everything – and everyone – he loves, he must move on.

Becoming warlord of Chazen also brings the ex-Warlord's wife to him. Itrac is younger and desperately inexperienced in the skills a Warlord's wife needs. Aldabreshin Warlords' wives are not just bejewelled and perfumed ornaments, but the domain's trade brokers and diplomats. The wealth of the domain rests in their hands and the richness of their clothing and jewellery denotes their status and success. Kheda's first wife, Janne, was several years older than him and came to him with a wealth of experience that included brokering trade deals. Now, he has Itrac, who is not much older than his daughter and who should be learning her business from a more senior wife, not trying to carry the whole weight of the domain on her back.

Mckenna is always interesting when writing about women – whose culture and lives always feature realistically in her stories, rather than being ignored as irrelevant or uninteresting. The system of women controlling trade and exercising power through dynastic matches is found in some New Guinea societies and it is interesting to see an exploration of the role of women who hold a non-European form of political power. Aldabreshin women are solely responsible for the timing and birth of children – and even the man who sires them. Fatherhood in the Aldabreshin Archipelago is social, not biological. There is a proverb, "He who tends the crop reaps the harvest, whether or not he sowed the seed." Aldabreshin women may choose whoever they wish to father their children and each has a devoted body slave who will enforce their wishes

even against their husbands. This makes Aldabreshin marriage much more of a partnership than might be expected given the vaguely oriental/Arabian touches to the worldbuilding. Indeed, the northern states of Einarinn have inaccurate fantasies about harems and the rest of the panoply of orientalism that we are familiar with.




Having sworn off magic, and trying to adjust to his new life, Kheda is dismayed to find the threat is not over and his new domain is still vulnerable. Here, I did feel the plots of the books got a little repetitive and it was the world building that kept me reading eagerly. I loved the Aldabreshin world and culture more than I did that of the northern Einarinn. McKenna's forte is in creating worlds and cultures that have depth and resonance. At times this can make the pace of the plot a little slow but, for me, exploring Kheda's world and beliefs more than made up for the rather deliberate pacing.

The Aldabrashi have a deep and abiding faith in the power of oracles. They look for signs and portents everywhere and one of the Warlord's roles is to interpret omens and read the skies. The Aldabreshin Compass is the open bowl of the sky and it is read by the positions of the moons and constellations. Kheda has been trained to interpret this and other divinatory techniques from a very young age. The narrative suggests some of the omens are simply cultural explanations for natural linkages that are not understood but on the whole the divination is simply a baseless cultural belief. With his experience of travel and contact with magicians of the north, Kheda comes, painfully, to question something that has been a fundamental part of his worldview for his entire life. It's not something he can share with anyone. Absolute ruler he might be, but suggesting that the divination which underpins daily life is false is to try to pit a temporal power against a cultural one. Even if he were inclined to distress his people, he would lose.

The *Aldabreshin Compass* creates a fascinating world and culture for Kheda's story to play out against. While the plot may be a little slow-burn for some people the action sequences are skilfully and cinematically written. There are dragons. Actual *scary* dragons that manage to be at once magically beautiful, awesomely powerful and great steaming biological animals. The dragons are *wonderful*. The world is very, very different from the white-bread mediaeval European fantasy setting and that gives it impetus and strength. I actually cared very little for any of the northern characters – I just wanted to know more about Kheda's world. I even found myself resenting the magic-based plot as getting in the way of learning more about how this culture worked and solving the domestic and political problems that beset Kheda. I'd really have liked to read something from Janne's or Itrac's point of view. These characters are fully three dimensional and I'd *really* like to know more about them. There is a definite sense that they are going about their business long after you shut the book. I'm not sure I can give stronger praise than that.

# OUR CHARITY RNIB

**The RNIB** has been supporting people with sight loss since they were founded, in October 1868, as **The British And Foreign Blind Association For Improving The Embossed Literature Of The Blind**. In 1914 it changed its name to **The National Institute for the Blind**, or **NIB** (which was, presumably, easier to get on a t-shirt). In 1949 it received the Royal Charter and changed its name to the **Royal National Institute Of Blind People**.

Over the years it has been responsible for adopting and standardizing systems for helping the visually impaired including the introduction of a standardized Braille system in 1870, the first Braille magazine, **Progress**, in 1871 and the first Braille dictionary in 1893. In 1918 their first "Sunshine Home for Blind *Babies" (and if that thought alone doesn't make you donate....*) was opened and in 1930 the standardized Braille music code was introduced. They introduced Talking Books in 1935 and it is still one of their flagship services with over 25,000 titles available. Their service is absolutely free and available to all ages and covers a wide range of genres. The books are available in a variety of formats including DAISY CD (one book per disc) and USB stick (three books per stick) and Digital Download. They also have a range of titles available to buy from their online shop and a selection of large print books and newspapers available.

Today, they support almost two million people in Britain who are living with sight loss. As well as supplying a wide variety of Talking Books for recreation they also provide educational books to children with sight difficulties as well as those with Dyslexia.

We have been donating to the charity for many **Novacon**s with our donation being specifically directed towards their Talking Books division. With your help this weekend we can help bring literature and Dan Brown to those who no longer have the ability to read clearly. It's very important work and all contributions are gladly received. We, The Committee, feel this is a worthy charity for such a literary based convention so join in.... let's make some money.

One of the ideas we have been batting around over the past few months is the possibility of using our donation to sponsor specific books. The **RNIB**, whilst having a large variety of books available, may not have books that we would request if we were to say, be stranded on a desert island. So this convention we are handing out questionnaires to gauge your opinion on this. Do you think it's a good idea that we, say, donate money to sponsor the audio availability of Craig Shaw Gardener (only kidding but you get the point)? Should we save up our contributions until we can sponsor a book of our choice? Check out the questionnaire and give us your thoughts.

If you wish to donate money yourself, either a one-off or monthly donation, or help raise money, information can be obtained through the **RNIB** website.

# THOUGHTS ON TALKING BOOKS

## By John P. McKenna

**One** of the more annoying aspects of failing eyesight for a lifelong voracious reader is the sense of loss at being cut off from the pleasure of a good book. There is a strong element of annoyance and bitterness involved in sight loss – WHY ME??!! Audio books do a great deal to remove this mental grievance. The relaxation of a good book concentrates the mind on the story or subject, and as a result there is less time for the annoyance and irritation of day to day events. I admit this is escapism to a great extent but the alternative is to end up always seeing the glass as half-empty rather than half-full.

I was steered towards the Calibre library by the liaison nurse at the initial clinic I attended and have found it an excellent set up. I avoided the RNIB as I was a bit annoyed at their charges at the time, in contrast to the free service from Calibre. But as the RNIB is now free too, I use both. A bigger bookshop! Though one pleasure that's not available from an audio book is the tactile and sensory enjoyment of a brand new, unopened book – but you can't have everything.

I was never read to as a child, mainly because I was reading from a very early age, and I read whatever I wanted to read. I must admit I find it pleasant to be read to – by most narrators. Some can have a soporific effect and result in me dozing off, but that will vary from listener to listener I suppose. That was one advantage of the CD format prior to MP3 discs – you got woken up more often! Though with USB and MP3 discs, I can have two books on the go at one time.

You get two books on each memory stick now, but no details on the label so it is a lucky dip – or not so lucky as the case may be. Both Calibre and RNIB systems are computer-led and at times this leads to a flood of titles from a single author. Hopefully I can avoid this by using both systems. The postal turnaround is excellent and the contact-line back-up from real people is equally good. As I become more iPad competent I'll be using their websites but the quarterly magazine, in both print and audio formats, is a good system for those who can't go online.

The listening equipment can be a cause of annoyance at times. The 'pause' function can be an issue – but that's for the manufacturers to solve rather than the charities. These minor problems will, I suppose, be refined with time and they are minor overall. The cost of various bits of listening kit is, in my opinion, on the high side but this seems to apply to a lot of equipment for the visually impaired when you compare the price to other electronics where costs have come down. I suppose it is a function of a smaller market, or could it be profiting from a captive audience? Heaven forfend!

These are purely personal observations and I realise other users will have differing views. As far as I am concerned, these charities have provided me with an invaluable link to the pleasures of books, and a modest yearly contribution – voluntary in both cases – is a small price to pay.

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# GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SCIENCE FICTION EDUCATION (AND DRAW)

**On** the next few pages you will find a GCSE Question Paper. You should also find a loose A4 size Answer Sheet – if not please contact Registration.

This is a multiple-choice quiz. Each question has been given several answers, only one of which is correct. They are often abbreviated because giving them in full would make the correct answer too obvious. You must match your answer to one of the given ones. It's a bit like being given specifications for making a key, together with five different locks. If the key is made correctly it will fit one of the locks, if it's not, it won't.

There are three sections to the paper – **section B** is easy; **section A** is medium and **section C** has harder questions. You have to submit two sections which must include **section A.** If you submit **sections A&B** you will obtain an **Ordinary Level GCSE Certificate** (if you pass), if you submit **sections A&C** you will gain an **Advanced Level GCSE Certificate** (if you pass). Pass mark is 40% and each certificate is graded.

Read each question, decide on your answer and match it to a given answer. The Answer Paper has numbered and lettered squares that correspond to the questions and answers on the Question Paper. Carefully **BLOCK OUT** with **black or blue** ink the squares corresponding to your chosen answers. **DO NOT circle, cross** or otherwise mark the squares, or use pencil, because the marking mechanism will be unable to cope with it and your paper will be rejected. If you make an error put a large X through the incorrect square.

When you have answered as many questions as possible decide whether you will submit **sections A&B (O Level)** *or* **sections A&C (A Level)**. Mark a large X from corner to corner of the section that you are NOT submitting for marking i.e. **B** *or* **C**. If all three sections are submitted, i.e. you have not crossed out either section, only **sections A&B** will be marked i.e. the paper will be marked at **Ordinary Level**.

Above **section A** you will find two lettered squares – [O] and [A] – corresponding to the Certificate Levels. Block out the square corresponding to the level you are submitting. If this is not done, or if it is not clear which level is being submitted, only **sections A&B** will be marked i.e. the paper will be marked at O **Level**.

PRINT your name and address legibly in the space provided – your answer paper will be returned to you with this part showing through the window of an envelope so the postal services must be able to read it if your Certificate is posted to you. Please submit your answers under your own name, precociousness is one thing, giving a certificate or draw prize to an infant is another.

Post your **Answer Paper** in the **GCSE** box at Registration before 11.00 a.m. on **SUNDAY**, preferably earlier, but watch the **GCSE** posters for any alteration to this deadline. Please only fold it once on the dotted line.

ALL Answer Papers submitted will be entered into a free draw for a prize – it's NOT highest score wins!

I hope to be able to mark the papers and give certificates on Sunday afternoon, so please see me then. If they aren't ready I will post them to you. In either case the draw prize will be given at the **Closing Ceremony**.

Finally, Certificates will be given or sent directly to you, no one else will know how you have done unless you tell them. So please have a go, you may be better than you think.

VERNON BROWN

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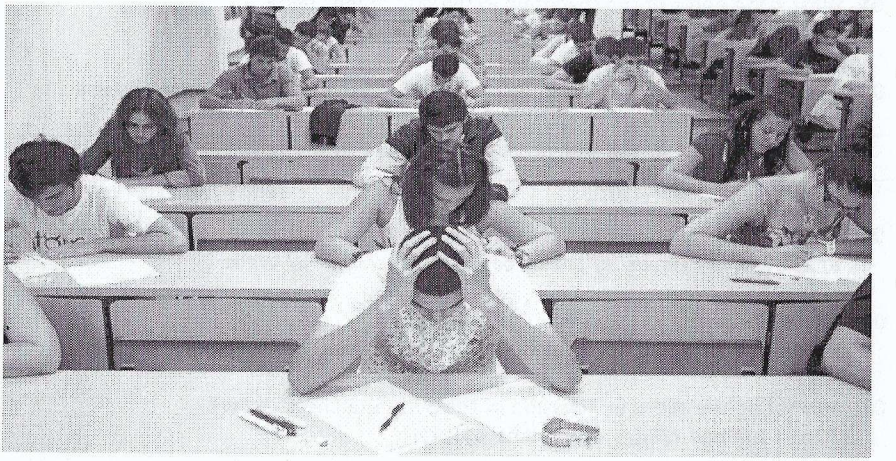

# TURN OVER THE PAGE

YOU MAY BEGIN NOW

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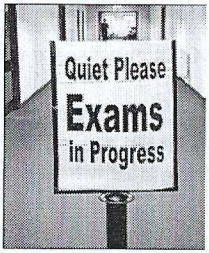
# GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SCIENCE FICTION EDUCATION (AND DRAW)




## SECTION A MEDIUM

01/ In "The Death of Grass" what causes it to die?
**a/Climate change b/Mutation c/Pesticides d/Virus e/Warfare**

02/ In which decade did the term "Robot" first appear?
**a/1880s b/1890s c/1900s d/1910s e/1920s**

03/ Which 1968 film was based on "The Sentinel" by A C Clarke?
**a/JIS b/LR c/ST d/TASO e/VOTM**

04/ What is the name of the spaceship in the first "Alien" film?
**a/ Anastasia b/ Explorer c/ Freedom d/ Nostromo e/ Pegasus**

05/ In October 1938 an updated radio version of which story caused many listeners to panic?
**a/ Frankenstein b/ Dorking Invasion c/ Empire of the Ants d/ War of the Worlds e/ World at Bay**

06/ The film "Forbidden Planet" is based on a work by whom?
**a/ Einstein b/ Heyer c/ Shakespeare d/ Socrates e/ Wells**

07/ How many names has God?
**a/ One million b/Nine million c/ One billion d/Nine billion e/ One trillion**

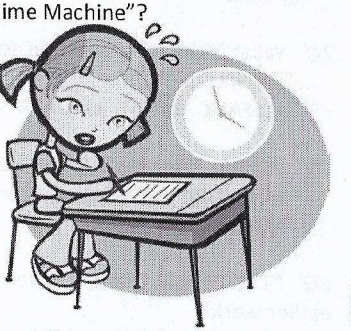
08/ In what do the aliens in "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" grow?
**a/Crabs b/Dogs c/Eggs d/Humans e/Pods**

09/ Who writes the "Honor Harrington" novels?
**a/ DD b/ DW c/ HH d/ JB e/ TT**

10/ "Yarbles! Bolshy great yarblockos to thee and thine!" is from which novel?
**a/AA b/ACO c/BOG d/ST e/TFW**

## SECTION B EASY

11/ Who are the gentle race in HG Wells novel "The Time Machine"?
**a/ Adora b/ Eloi c/ Morlocks d/ Os-Ostra**
**e/ Yarri**



12/ In Vernes novel how many leagues did the submarine travel under the sea?
**a/ 20 b/ 200 c/ 2000 d/ 20,000**
**e/ 200,000**

13/ Who popularised the phrase "Science Fiction" in his magazine?
**a/ GRW b/ HG c/ HGW d/ HH e/ IA**

14/ Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future, first appeared in which comic?
**a/ Beano b /Dandy c /Eagle d/ Falcon e/ Swift**

15/ Which alien wanted to phone home?
**a/BT b/ET c/Gort d/Mork e/No 5**

16/ In 'Back to the Future' (film) what form did the time machine take?
**a/Archway b/Belt c/Car d/Chair e/Radio**

17/ In 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' what is the answer to everything?
**a/BHEER b/DN c/FT d/SOMA e/YOGA**

18/ Which author propounded the "Three Laws of Robotics"?
**a/ ACC b/ BA c/ HGW d/ IA e/ JV**

19/ How do triffids communicate with each other?
**a/Pollen b/Rattles c/Scent d/Tendrils e/Touching**

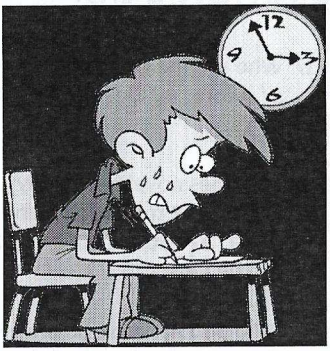
20/ Ray Harryhausen is best known for his?
**a/Book editing b/Novelisations c/Paintings d/Research**
**e/Special effects**

## SECTION C HARDER

21/ The comic in which Dan Dare originally appeared was the idea of whom?
**a/ Astronomer b/ Explorer c/ Policeman**
**d/ Politician e/ Vicar**

22/ Who made the first SF epic film LVDLL (Examiners acronym) over a century ago?
**a/ CH b/ GM c/ HW d/ JV e/ TF**

23/ Where was the first ever SF convention held?
**a/ Bradford b/ Chicago c/ Leeds d/ London e/ Paris**

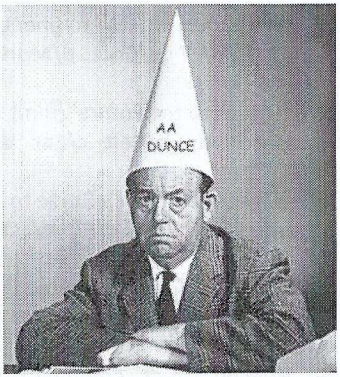



24/ What is the full title of the novel known as "Frankenstein"?
**a/BFAHC b/FLIT c/FOASR d/FOTMP e/TFM**

25/ What is "jaunting" (Bester)?
**a/Hunting b/Sailing c/Singing d/Teleporting e/Timetraveling**

26/ "The Time Machine" (Novel) was based on which earlier work?
**a/ ASHOFT b/ TCA c/ TTS d/ TTT e/ TWV**

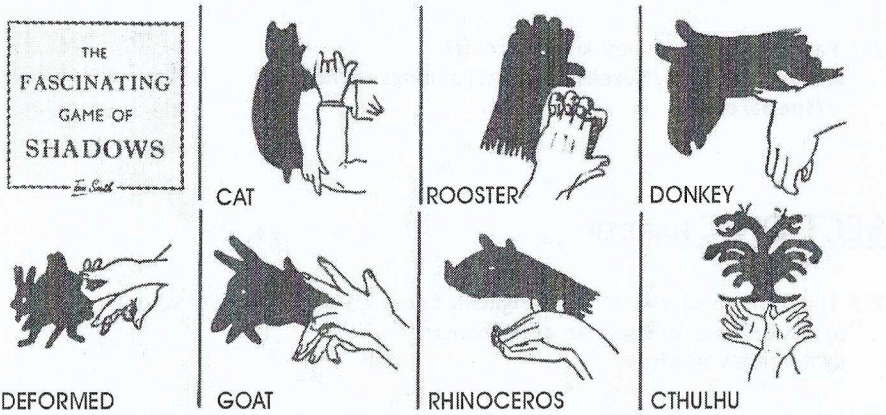
27/ "I always get the shakes before a drop" is the first line of which novel?
**a/ MTTS b/ SC c/ SSS d/ ST e/ TW**




28/ Who wrote the "Novels of the Change/Dies the Fire" series?
**a/ DD b/DW c/EF d/JRB e/SMS**

29/ Which of HG Wells novels is subtitled "A Grotesque Romance"?
**a/AMU b/MLG c/TFOTG d/TIM e/TTC**

30/ Who wrote the novel "SS/GB" currently being filmed by the BBC?
**a/HH b/LD c/PA d/PKD e/S**



# NOVACON 46

11 - 13 November 2016

## MEMBERSHIP LIST

1. Juliet McKenna
2. Stan Nicholls
3. Anne Nicholls
4. Kari Sperring
5. Phil Nanson
6. Brian Aldiss
7. Douglas Spencer
8. Tony Berry
9. Helena Bowles
10. Cat Coast
11. Eve Harvey
12. John Harvey
13. Alice Lawson
14. Steve Lawson
15. Yvonne Rowse
16. Gary Starr
17. Dave Hicks
18. Penny Hicks
19. Richard Standage
20. Sue Jones
21. Morag O'Neill
22. Tim Stannard
23. Harpal Singh
24. Caroline Mullan
25. Brian Ameringen
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**We meet on the second Friday of every month at the Briar Rose Hotel on Bennett's Hill in Birmingham, just 5 minutes walk from New Street Station and handy for all bus routes. Our meetings usually host a talk by an author or SF related guest. We have Dave Hutchinson in April and Adrian Tchaikovsky in May. Our next meeting is our AGM and book auction on January 13th at 7.45pm. Admission to the AGM is free, normal meetings £4:00.**

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